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Audit Paper Part 1+2+3

May 5, 2024

Part 1

The Organization Selected

Wounded Warrior Project | <https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/>⁵

To honor and empower wounded warriors. | To foster the most successful, well-adjusted generation of wounded service members in our nation's history.

Details, History & Purpose

History: "Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) began in 2003, founded by John Melia, as a small, grassroots effort providing simple care and comfort items to the hospital bedsides of the first wounded service members returning home from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan." ⁶

(<https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/mission>) WWP started as a small scale venture, which offered backpacks filled with comfort items to patients at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

The post-service needs have evolved for the community that this organization serves and therefore their programs and services have had to progress as well. This change can be seen through their direct programs in mental health, career counseling, advocacy efforts and long-term rehabilitative care all with the goal of improving the "lives of millions of warriors and their families". ⁶ (<https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/mission>)

Who They Serve: Veterans and service members who served in the military on or after September 11, 2001, and incurred a physical or mental injury, illness, or wound during or after service. ⁶

(<https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/mission>)

Mission: The WWP mission is to honor and empower Wounded Warriors who incurred a physical or mental injury, illnesses, or wound, co-incident to your military service on or after September 11, 2001. You may also be eligible for the program if you are the family member or caregiver of a Wounded Warrior. ⁶ (<https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/mission>)

Values: Service: We serve and collaborate with humility, dignity, and respect. Integrity: We are honest, transparent, and accountable. Loyalty: We passionately commit to our mission and to each other. Innovation: We have the courage to challenge the status quo and vigorously debate ideas in the pursuit of excellence. ⁶ (<https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/mission>)

Organizational Chart

Board of Directors: Consists of twelve members.

Leadership: Consists of seven members leading key areas which include: Chief Executive Officer, Chief of Staff, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Program Officer, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, Chief Information Officer, and Chief Development Officer.

Employees: There are 19,000 employees, with one in five of them active-duty military or a veteran.

<https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/>⁶



Ethics Management Infrastructure

WWP most likely has a formal Code of Ethics that parallels their core values, ethical standards, and principles. Most large organizations have specific policies and procedures developed as it relates to ethical conduct which would include guidelines for conflicts of interest, ethical behavior, and decision-making processes. The organization also most likely provides and potentially mandates training and resources to its staff and volunteers to ensure there is understanding of the organization's expectations for ethical behavior and standards. When looking into the code of ethics for this organization we find that they follow principles of service, integrity, loyalty and innovation. They define service as: "We serve and collaborate with humility, dignity, and respect." ⁷ Integrity is defined as: "We are honest, transparent, and accountable." ⁷ Loyalty is presented as: "We passionately commit to our mission and to each other." ⁷ Innovation is defined with the guidance or: "We have the courage to challenge the status quo and vigorously debate ideas in the pursuit of excellence." ⁷ This is exemplified through internal review as well as presented externally through a "Code of Conduct" ⁷ document that outlines the expectations for "alumni, family support members and guests" ⁷ as an extension of the organizations mission and values. Aligned with this, some of the specifics that they expect include inclusivity, nondiscriminatory and non-offensive behavior when participating in or representing the organization. This code is provided and reviewed with each volunteer as well as at each event. Similarly, this organization reviews their ethics principles internally. We can assume that this is regular as part of their human resources practices and policies for adherence and understanding for all employees. Clearly communicating and enforcing these policies reduces the risk of unethical behavior and improper actions.

(<https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/media/qa3lgdlu/codeofconduct.pdf>) ⁷

Brief Introduction to Ethical Misconduct Cases

In 2016, stories by CBS and The New York Times, who cited whistleblowers, detailed allegations of waste and abuse, which included extravagant all-hands conferences and uncontrolled spending on ticketed outings that had limited benefit for the veterans they are supposed to help.⁹ The ethics issues that also came up related to the very high salary of the CEO, which was almost twice as much as the previous CEO. This also detailed the low ratio of funding that was actually going to the mission and community they were focused on and claiming to serve. The organization claimed that eighty percent of donations went to funding their mission, while in actuality it was sixty percent. Another issue is the organization was “actively lobbying for less oversight by outside regulators”³. (Howard) A legal nonprofit entity has an obligation to fulfill its fiduciary requirements and demonstrate transparency with ethical credibility. It must be open in terms of how the organization runs and how it uses donations from supporters. I have chosen this situation and this organization as it gained a lot of attention when this information came out. This is a strong, fairly recent, example that really brought awareness to the reality of running a nonprofit and the critical obligations and ethics that are associated with this. I found this was a good example of a well-known nonprofit, in a recent situation where they had to navigate through unethical behavior that occurred within their organization.

In Bowman and West¹, figure 2.3 on page 35, there are four forces that influence ethical performance which include leader’s example, strategic policies, organizational culture and individual characteristics. This relates to the podcast situation with Toby Grove¹⁰ as his situation consisted of organizational as well as individual factors that influenced as well as could have avoided the bad behavior. Organizational checks and balances could have been present to have caught the fraud in that example and this applies here to WWP, as learned in our course readings and specifically Cooper, Chapters four and five.² From an individual perspective, the personal

morals, as exemplified in case study 2.2 and the firefighter situation, demonstrates the high level of stress that is present in choice making or micro dilemmas, which relate to the issues in Toby Grove's fraud situation and to this WWP scenario. ¹ (Bowman and West) Toby and the others on his staff that participated in the fraud could have been avoided if any one of the individuals paused to stop what they knew was wrong. The podcast brings up the issue of do the individuals actually realize the actions are wrong when trusted leaders are also doing this, I believe this is a close alignment with the situation at WWP. This also aligns with the firefighter example and correlates that the individual may not realize the unethical implications as they "see" their actions as benefiting the greater good and therefore not wrong. Ethics awareness and training programs, internal controls, and oversights, encouraging reporting as well as holding leaders accountable for improper behavior all could have helped avoid these situations from happening. Avoiding fraud is a multifaceted approach that includes addressing individual vulnerabilities as well as organizational issues. This is an obligation that organizations, especially nonprofit organizations should be operating on.

Human behavior, ethics and morality are very complex as we consider why good people do bad things versus why bad people do bad things. ⁹ Good people do bad things based on situational factors, rationalizing, and moral disengagement. ¹⁰ Using one example from previous course work is "Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development With Behavioral Orientation" which demonstrates stages of right and the frame of reference as well as preconventional, conventional and postconventional for good people to cycle through their decision making to act out. ¹ (Bowman and West) For bad people doing bad things, there are stages as well, however they are different in my opinion than good people doing bad things. When individuals consistently engage in unethical behavior, typically they have a lack of moral values and a heightened focus on personal gain. There are also psychological factors and habitual actions that lead to the consistent bad behavior. In

Milgram's example in the readings, it supports this when the example is used supporting the discovery of the conditions under which people would defy authority. ¹ (Bowman and West) In both scenarios there is the role of the individual and situational factors in influencing unethical behavior, there is different emphasis on each of the parts and understanding these dynamics would work to inform interventions that can be deployed to avoid things like fraud from occurring. These theories and examples align with the situation that occurred at WWP.

Resulting from the unethical behavior at WWP, the organization spent less on programs for veterans as it was spending more to serve themselves and paid staff, leading to public and donor base distrust. Each example of ethical misconduct, undermines trust in nonprofit organizations and casts doubt on what good, basic, expected human behavior should include. The positive here is that WWP has the capability to correct these mistakes and put controls in place to prevent this from happening again. This will help with donor trust and overall transparency.

Part 2

Studying the Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) has offered a good opportunity to examine the details of organizational ethics. This specifically relates to the context of nonprofit entities that focus on and serve vulnerable populations. My decision to focus on the WWP comes from learning about a series of reported ethical misconducts that emerged around 2016. This situation was high-profile, as it related to their spending practices and organizational culture and attracted significant media attention as well as raised concerns among their donors and stakeholders.

Case of Ethical Misconduct

One of the most prominent cases for the WWP, involved allegations of lavish spending on conferences, staff retreats, and excessive salaries for executives. The reports indicated that a significant portion of the donations meant for assisting wounded veterans was being spent on non-program expenses, which generated outrage, distrust and disillusionment among donors and beneficiaries alike.

Specifically, about 40 percent of the organization's donations in 2014 were spent on its overhead, this equates to approximately \$124 million, according to the charity-rating group Charity Navigator.³ (Howard) Initially, the organization denied the accusations as well as demanded retractions, then went silent. This excessive spending included premium airline tickets, bottle service at group outings, lavish expenditures for conferences and meetings for all staff members.

To further expand on why the WWP was chosen to exemplify ethical misconduct we examine multiple instances which include, as previously stated, excessive spending on overhead, in addition to the lack of transparency, aggressive fundraising tactics, internal controversies, and impact on beneficiaries. Reports indicated that a significant portion of the donations received by WWP was spent on overhead and lavish employee gatherings rather than directly on veterans' programs and services. Donors were under the impression that a larger percentage of their contributions would directly benefit wounded veterans. There were also concerns regarding the lack of transparency in WWP's financial management. Donors were not provided clear information about how their donations were being used, leading to mistrust and questions about the integrity of the organization. The WWP was criticized for its aggressive and misleading fundraising tactics as it was suggested that donors felt pressured into giving money, believing that more of their contributions would go towards helping veterans than was the case. In addition to the externally facing issues, internally there was also controversies. These are related to its organizational

culture and treatment of employees. This was demonstrated through reports of a toxic work environment and questionable management practices, which further tarnished its reputation. This ethical misconduct not only affected the organization's donors and supporters but also had potential negative implications for the veterans who relied on WWP's programs and services. Misuse or misallocation of funds means fewer resources and support for wounded veterans in need. (Howard³, Moss⁴, References)

Ethics Infrastructure of WWP

When reviewing the Wounded Warrior Project scandal, we can apply the “Five-Stage Method For Analyzing Ethical Issues” from Bowman and West Exhibit 5.1. ¹ This strategy focuses on cognitive ethics which include attention or “seeing” the problem, perception and determining if it is your responsibility, processing or how to think about the problem, action or deciding if action is needed, and evaluation or reviewing what was learned. As it relates to this WWP case, the leadership and staff participants did not “see” the problem or did not understand that there were ethical issues occurring and that it was their responsibility to act and stop it. This text, when reviewing the processing stage, states that reviewing the problem includes impulsive reactions, of “just do it”, simple nonchalant responses, of “I just work here”, and then ethical reflection. The cognitive theories or ethical reflection weighs the expected consequences of taking action, consequentialism, and the duty to act, known as deontology or the rule ethics. Next is the fourth step, action, having identified and processed the issue, does this person need to act? A prime example of this, and a helpful way of addressing this question, is in Bowman and West as the text describes “The Kew Gardens Principle” ¹ where 38 people allegedly witnessed a murder from their apartment and did not take action. This includes assistance in determining whether or not to take action through examining the questions of, is there a need for action, if this something near to me,

is there capacity from the witness to change the situation and the last resort of deciding after no one else will act, if the individual will act and with that decision to develop an action plan.

After coming home wounded from Iraq in 2006, Army Staff Sergeant Erick Millette admired the work of The Wounded Warrior Project, so much so that he began to work for them in 2013.¹¹ He quit after just two years, as he witnessed extreme spending that was not going to support the cause and the mission of the organization as well as not true to honoring the intent that the donors had for the use of the funding. "You're using our injuries, our darkest days, our hardships, to make money. So you can have these big parties," he told CBS News. Millette said he witnessed lavish spending on staff. "Let's get a Mexican mariachi band in there, let's get maracas made with [the] WWP logo, put them on every staff member's desk. Let's get it catered and have a big old party," he described. "Going to a nice fancy restaurant is not team building. Staying at a lavish hotel at the beach here in Jacksonville, and requiring staff that lives in the area to stay at the hotel is not team building," Millette continued. CBS News spoke to more than 40 former employees who described a charity where spending was out of control."¹¹ Employees feared retaliation and either did not speak up or hid their identity if they did speak up. This brought to light that in 2010 the organization spent approximately \$1.7M on meetings and events which then grew to in \$26.2M in 2014 for conferences, conventions, and meetings. Ironically, the military considers spending on resorts and alcohol as fraud waste and abuse. Employees identified that under the leadership of Steven Nardizzi the expenses and expenditures skyrocketed. This occurred when we look at the salaries of the founder, John Melia, as CEO and then the next CEO Steven Nardizzi, whom was receiving nearly twice the amount of Melia at almost \$500,000. Another specific example of this is when local employees were required to stay at a hotel for meetings even when they lived close by, excessive spending demonstrated here. Meetings being held for multiple days at expensive, destination luxury resorts, like the one in 2014 at a Colorado Springs luxury resort, is another

example of frivolous spending. Millette and the other employees that spoke up, evaluated the ethical issues and decided to take action. They may not have gone through an official structured 'five stage' process however we can assume they went through something similar as they were deciding to act.

The Wounded Warrior Project's ethics infrastructure seemed to lack vital mechanisms to prevent the misconduct and there were multiple factors that contributed to this. The organization's rapid growth led to a lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities, which potentially created conflicts of interest and opportunities for misuse of funds. This would be considered conflicts of responsibility where protocols for oversight would have facilitated preventing this situation. The absence of clear guidelines, oversight mechanisms and specific components to define the proper use of funds for expenditures on non-program activities left room for discretionary spending without necessary accountability. Executives and senior management were included in the allegations as being involved and even condoned the excessive and lavish spending. This eroded the ethical foundation of the organization and exemplifies that there was a lack of responsible administrators and oversight. There were also weaknesses in the organizational culture. There was such an intense focus on the organization's growth and public image, which seemed to overshadow the core mission of serving wounded veterans. This led to a culture that prioritized fundraising and publicity over ethical conduct, responsibilities, and accountability.

The situation with The Wounded Warrior Project is an example of ethics management issues within the organization as reflected in Chapter 8 of Bowman and West.¹ According to the reading, there are various approaches to organizational ethics which include immoral, amoral and moral as well as "Kohlberg's stages of individual moral development from Chapter 4, that all may be used by organizations."¹ (Bowman and West) These detail how an organization first focuses on "financial

survival as their moral beacon”, then the pursuit of self-interest to justify the “tactics used”, then conformity to similar institutions as a guide for right and wrong. As we get to stage four, an organization “takes direction from institutional authority to determine their standards and then Stage Five being majority rule becoming the standard as “participatory management and democratic decision making” take hold. ¹ (Bowman and West). The WWP demonstrates from these principles as the frivolous activities of the leadership and management became the accepted norm until someone spoke up about this not being the appropriate behavior and use of donor dollars. Kohlberg’s stages are also an excellent way of defining the activities around self-interest being used to justify the tactics and are highlighted when the Director of Alumni, Captain Ryan Kules, is questioned about the lavish spending and meetings at five-star resorts instead of cheaper options, he responds as, "it's the best use of donor dollars to ensure we are providing programs and services to our warriors and families at the highest quality." ¹¹ When we look at the approaches to management ethics through immoral, amoral and moral management we see that the WWP situation goes through the levels of ethical norms, motives, goals, orientation towards law and then strategy. These approaches are defined as immoral, or opposing what is moral, amoral, neither immoral or moral and outside where moral judgements apply, and moral, where activity conforms to ethical or right behavior and ethical leadership is commonplace in management. ¹ (Bowman and West) The WWP scandal is an example of immoral approaches to ethics management through the misuse of funds and unnecessary lavish spending of donor dollars when more responsible actions and decisions could have prevailed. The organization could have taken steps to align with their values prior to making the decisions they made and adhere to basic ethical principles that exist. “The aim of an ethically grounded system of management is to build and sustain a set of shared values that will be beneficial to the organization, its members and the public.” ¹ (Bowman and West)

I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge overall what vital mechanisms of ethical conduct are outlined in Bowman and West's "Public Service Ethics: Individual and Institutional Responsibilities" which addresses this in several ways. The first is responsibility, where public servants have a responsibility to act in the best interests of the public they serve and be accountable for their decisions and actions. This could have occurred in a more optimal way for the WWP as it relates to the spending of donor dollars. Responsibility is next as the WWP has a responsibility to act in the best interest of the public they serve which includes being accountable for their actions and decisions. The WWP could have also acted with more integrity, another principle outlined in the text, where they should have been upholding high standards of integrity, honesty, and transparency in their conduct. They should act ethically in all interactions and avoid conflicts of interest. This did not occur in this situation with WWP and they were not transparent with how they were spending the donations they received. There was opportunity from The WWP to also ensure fairness and justice in their decision-making processes, as discussed in the text. Next is respect for the law as public servants have a duty to respect and uphold the law which includes adhering to legal requirements and procedures in their work which the leadership of the WWP did not fully execute. Treating all individuals with dignity, respect, and sensitivity and recognizing and valuing the diversity of perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences is also important and I believe that The WWP did not fully respect the injured warriors they chose as their mission to support. This leads right into the topic of public interest above personal or organizational interests which involves work to promote the common good and enhance the well-being of society as a whole, or here wounded warriors that needed support due to their service and the organization did not optimize that service. Accountability is critical on many levels, as outlined in the book organizations should be accountable for their actions and decisions and transparency about their conduct, accepting responsibility for any mistakes or wrongdoing, and being open to scrutiny and oversight. This only occurred with The Wounded Warrior Project when

whistleblowers brought this up. Organizations should also demonstrate professionalism in their work and this includes being competent, knowledgeable, and diligent in fulfilling their responsibilities, which was not fully executed by leadership when they made spending decisions for The Wounded Warrior Project. These mechanisms of ethical conduct provide a framework for guiding the behavior of public servants and nonprofit organizations and promoting ethical governance in public service organizations. They help to ensure that these groups act with integrity, fairness, and a commitment to serving the public good.

Acknowledgment and Strategy for Prevention

Following the public outcry and scrutiny by the media, the WWP implemented several steps to acknowledge the ethical violations and implement corrective measures.³ (Howard) The first of these is that the organization underwent a significant leadership overhaul. These leadership changes started with new executives being brought in to steer the organization back to focus on its mission-driven roots and foundation. The organization then revised its financial policies, which included stricter financial controls and guidelines being implemented to ensure transparency and accountability in spending. These newly instituted procedures included regular audits and independent reviews of financial practices. The WWP also put enhanced and mandatory ethics training into action for employees and executives. This was enacted to instill and sustain a culture of integrity and responsibility for the stewardship of donor funds. There was also stakeholder engagement where the WWP connected with donors, beneficiaries, and other key investors to work to rebuild trust and solicit feedback on improving organizational practices.⁸ (Military.com) The WWP committed to regular public reporting of its financials and the outcomes of their programs to demonstrate accountability and transparency. Looking at these components and mechanisms reveals a complex interplay between organizational structure, culture, and ethics. The

WWP's ethical misconduct can be attributed to a combination of structural deficiencies, cultural weaknesses, and leadership failures. Weaknesses in organizational culture created an environment where ethical lapses were tolerated or even incentivized. The absence of specific mechanisms in the ethics infrastructure allowed for excessive discretionary spending without adequate oversight, leading to misuse of funds. There was a lack of responsible administrators as role models that further eroded the ethical fabric of the organization, as leaders failed to set a positive example for employees to emulate. ² (Cooper)

Looking back at some of the lessons from this semester, we can apply certain principles to the WWP ethical situation. Interpreting the Kew Gardens Principles, as it relates to this organization, considers the ethical standards of honesty, integrity, and accountability that is present in this situation. ¹ (Bowman and West) This correlation emphasizes the importance of upholding these principles in all situations. This did not happen in the activities of the WWP leadership and staff who failed at accountability for their business spending habits and dishonest reporting that the majority of donor funds were being used for programs to fulfill their mission to support veterans. Next, we have the ethical principles approach, which helps us analyze the ethical dimensions of the WWP situation and understand how these actions violated fundamental ethical principles. This also helps us evaluate the motivations for the ethical misconduct and underscores the importance of upholding ethical standards in nonprofit organizations. The actions of the WWP staff were unjust, the principles of fairness and equality were violated through the misuse of donor funding which undermined donor trust. The virtue theory approach provides insights into understanding this WWP situation by focusing on the character traits and moral virtues of the individuals involved. The ethical motivations of the leaders and staff lacked character virtues, and ethical judgment. These leaders could have upheld an ethical culture and influenced the behavior of colleagues in the proper way versus a scandalous way by prioritizing loyalty, integrity, and honesty

instead of the misuse of funding. They did this due to selfish reasons, the desire to protect the staff and themselves from negative consequences because of improper actions. Through these theories we can potentially gain insight into the motivations and factors that contributed to the ethical misconduct that occurred in the WWP. By understanding this, it can facilitate and inform efforts to prevent and address unethical behavior going forward. This can also promote and contribute to future nonprofit organization processes for accountability and integrity.

Studying the Wounded Warrior Project's ethical misconduct offers valuable insights into the importance of strong ethics infrastructure, responsible leadership, and a robust organizational culture in preventing ethical failures. While the WWP has taken steps to address its past mistakes, the case underscores the ongoing challenges nonprofits face in balancing growth, accountability, and mission integrity.

Part 3

Recommendations For Improving Ethical Behavior

As discussed throughout this paper, The Wounded Warrior Project faced scrutiny and criticism in the past due to allegations of misconduct and concerns about its administrative ethics. There can be several recommendations to propose to address these issues and improve ethical behavior within the organization. First, The WWP can implement clear and transparent policies and procedures for financial management, the operations of their programs, and decision-making processes to enhance transparency and accountability. The organization can also establish mechanisms for internal and external oversight, such as independent audits and advisory boards, to ensure accountability. Fostering a culture of ethical leadership at all levels of the organization, starting from the top leadership will strengthen all aspects of the organization and help prevent misconduct from happening again. With this, they can also implement and provide training and

development programs for leaders to enhance their ethical decision-making skills and integrity. After the scandal the CEO and COO were fired, and they brought in a new CEO Mike Linnington at a salary that was half of what the former CEO was receiving. This emphasizes the recommendation of the importance of strengthening leadership from the top. The organization seems to also have established and implemented a code of ethics and conduct. This was developed and disseminated as a comprehensive code of ethics and conduct that outlines expected behaviors, values, and ethical principles for all staff, volunteers, and stakeholders. This works to ensure that the code is regularly reviewed, updated, and communicated throughout the organization. The organization could also offer training and workshops on ethical decision-making to employees and volunteers, emphasizing the importance of ethical behavior in all aspects of their work. This would also provide guidance and support for staff to navigate ethical dilemmas and seek ethical solutions. The Wounded Warrior Project can work to foster and cultivate a culture of integrity, honesty, and respect within the organization through communication, recognition, and reinforcement of ethical behavior. They can encourage open dialogue and feedback channels where employees can raise concerns or report misconduct without fear of retaliation. According to a Military.com article, and the new CEO, the organization has also implemented “surveys for everything” which will support this recommendation to avoid the situation that happened. This action also leads into the recommendation to implement whistleblower protections through the establishing of policies and procedures to protect whistleblowers who report unethical behavior or misconduct. This will ensure confidentiality and non-retaliation for individuals who come forward with information about potential ethical violations and work to avoid a scandal from occurring again.

Reviewing and revising the organization's governance structure to ensure proper oversight and accountability by strengthening the role of the board of directors in monitoring organizational

performance, ethics, and compliance will also facilitate better ethical practices as this organization goes forward. All of this supports and expands the actions of conducting regular assessments and evaluations of the organization's ethical climate, integrity, and compliance with ethical standards through awareness of leadership, surveys and other activities to incorporate feedback from stakeholders, employees, and external partners to identify areas for improvement and track progress over time.

By implementing these recommendations, the Wounded Warrior Project can demonstrate its commitment to ethical conduct, rebuild trust with stakeholders, and ensure that its mission of supporting wounded veterans is carried out with integrity, transparency and accountability. It is a fine line between promoting the organization to build financial capacity to execute the mission and solving the problems that the mission focuses on while growing to the point where the mission becomes secondary. "Wounded Warrior Project crossed this line, but they have the infrastructure – and track-record – to course-correct and further their goals of veteran support. If they can't, then we hope that donors begin looking to reputable local organizations, startup organizations or even directly supporting our friends, family and neighbors who have served. It's the least that we can do for the most vulnerable of our veteran population." ⁸ (Military.com)

References

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